They called themselves Psychiatric Advocates, Social Workers, Front Line Workers. They were fighting in society's trenches, on behalf of the outcasts society shoved there. They were "Anti-Oppressionists," according to community college course descriptions. Really they were pretty much what Caspar said they were: lazy and fucked-up.

Adam was more charitable. Discussing the field with him one evening, I said I thought I thought it attracted a lot of losers. He said it attracted a lot of insecure people. I thought Adam himself was the principal exception, until it happened. Only a week ago he'd been talking about flue shots. There was a shortage of the vaccine but he'd qualify because he was a "Front Line Worker."

I remember watching him sprawling as usual in the office-chair beside the computer. He asked me if I had a G.P. Of course I didn't. It looked like it was going to be a really bad flue season. He'd already had a bad cold that he still couldn't get rid of. It kept coming back. Now it was in his chest. He slapped it with his large hand. He thought all the staff should get their shots this year.

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Sam was Betty's worker. Betty showed me a picture that Sam had given her of a room in his house, full of caged